

Intersectionality

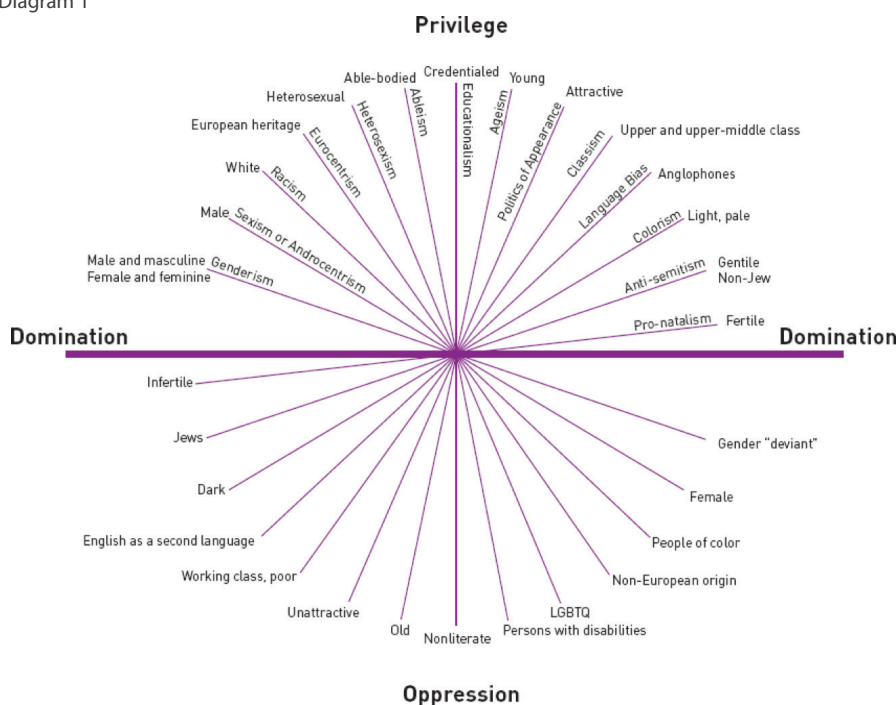
A Critical Framework for STEM Equity

Building a brighter outlook for women faculty in STEM is best accomplished by implementing innovative approaches to systemic change. AWIS research shows how intersectionality can achieve STEM equity.

Defining Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a contextual framework for examining how systems of oppression deeply intertwine and influence experiences and opportunities. As shown on Diagram 1, the systems that shape experiences cannot be separated, even though they are often studied this way. For example, an African American woman with a disability does not walk through life only as a woman, African American, or person with a disability, but instead through her own unique interaction with the systems in which she is situated. Intersectionality deepens the understanding of and ability to improve the real life experiences of marginalized groups in STEM.

Diagram 1



The History

Coined by scholar Kimberlé W. Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality is rooted in the research and activism of women of color, extending back to Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman" speech in 1851. Observing the absence of women of color in feminist and race-based social movements, scholar activists like Crenshaw, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Cherrie Moraga have called for a deeper look at the interconnected factors that influence power, privilege and oppression.

Learn more about using intersectionality in research and practice in the AWIS Research Center at <https://www.awis.org/broadening-participation/>

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Applying Intersectionality to STEM Equity Work

Intersectionality contributes to better outcomes for seeking equality as people are considered as a whole, not just with one part of their identity.

Guiding Inclusive Survey Design

Surveys may offer a limited set of categories for gender, race and ethnicity, and few ask questions about sexuality or disability. An intersectional approach pushes researchers to expand the options offered to participants in questionnaires to better represent identities and experiences. For instance, instead of listing only two, mutually exclusive gender options (man and woman), researchers can also offer categories such as agender, gender-queer, gender-nonconforming, non-binary, and pangender for more inclusive survey results.

Gaining New Insights on Existing Data

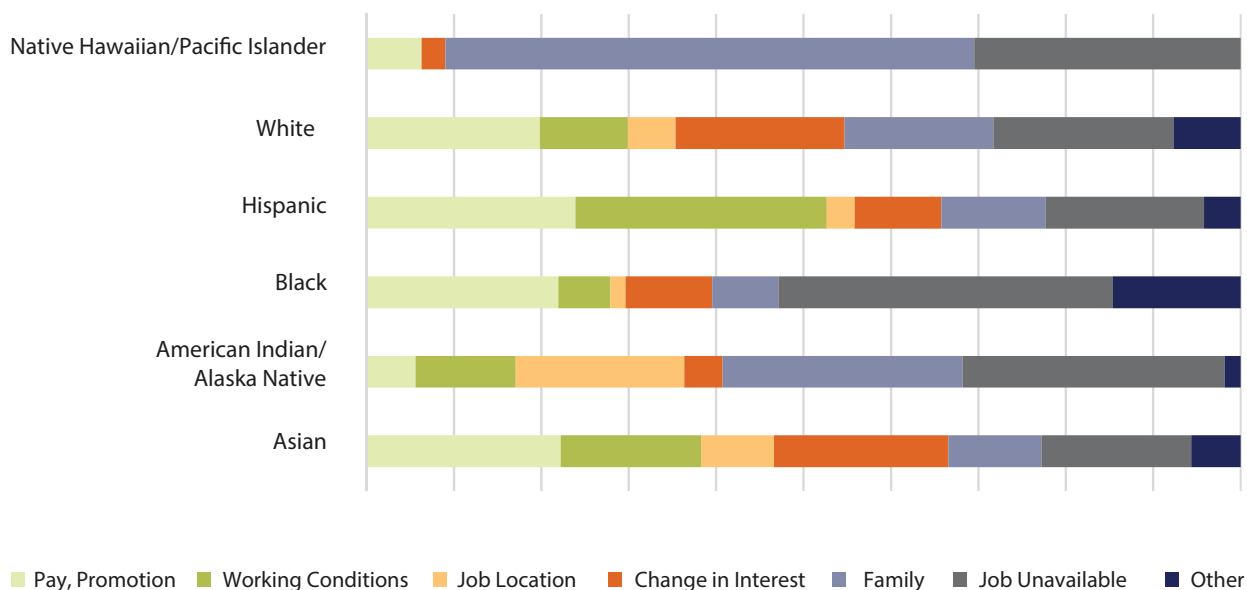
Often, STEM equity and participation research looks at demographic categories like gender and race separately and even in ways that reinforce

stereotypes. For example, retention research often attributes women's departure from STEM jobs to family-related reasons. AWIS intersectionality research presents data influenced by gender and race, demonstrating that STEM attrition connects to systemic issues related to hiring, promotion, and working conditions.

Thinking Critically

Whether in research, advocacy or practice, an intersectional approach helps focus on systems and contexts. This includes reviewing research questions asked, questioning assumptions made in policies and programs, considering who the work impacts (or doesn't), noticing whose voices are missing, and connecting what is discovered to larger systemic issues.

Primary Reason Women with STEM Degrees Take Jobs Outside Their Field By Race



Sources:

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Metcalf, H., Russell, D., & Hill, C. (2018). Broadening the Science of Broadening Participation in STEM Through Critical Mixed Methodologies and Intersectionality Frameworks: *American Behavioral Scientist*, 63(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764218768872>